Zane Grey's Book of Angling, "Tales of Fishes"

By ALEXANDER STODDART.,

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Of the four million men who responded to the call of their country, doubtless the spirit of adventure appealed to many. The spirit of adventure is possessed from the cradle to the grave, but it is only those who respond who learn of its joys and are ready when opportunity beckons to heed the call to go forth to the thrills that the unexpected gives.

Doubtless hundreds of thousands coming back from the great war, having had a taste of adventure, will be eager and willing to try fields anew when the call comes, for now having once gone forth it is in the blood to seek new pleasures the moment that the way is shown.

Zane Grey in his book *Tales of Fishes* points the way to thrills that come to the man who is willing to take a chance where the rod points even if there is a spice of danger attached to it. The way lies in angling for big game fishes of the sea with sportsmanlike tackle.

The years are but few since Dr. Charles Frederick Holder called attention to the possibilities of sport with big game fishes of the sea and introduced to anglers a paradise in Santa Catalina, Cal., the home of the broadbill and marlin swordfish, the tuna, the albicore and the yellow tail.

It is sad to think that in those brief years since the founding of the Tuna Club in 1898 commercial greed and overfishing have so reduced the big game fishes of the Pacific at this anglers' paradise that sportsman Zane Grey should have to write:

"If you are a fisherman of any degree, and if you aspire to some wonderful experiences with the great and vanishing game fish of the Pacific, and if you would love to associate with these adventures some dazzling white hot days, and unforgetable cool nights where your eyelids get glued with sleep, and the fragrant salt breath of the sea, its music and motion and color and mystery and beauty—then go to Avalon before it is too late."

II.

The charm of *Tales of Fishes* is that it lives up to its title. They are tales that are told with all the ability, color and dramatic possibilities of a story teller who knows and loves his subject. Robert H. Davis knows. He once wrote to Grey: "If you went out with a mosquito net to catch a mess of minnows your story would read like Roman gladiators seining the Tigris for whales."

Yet Davis is not a true believer, although he is a good fisherman. He writes to Grey: "You say 'the hard, diving fight of a tuna liberates the brute instinct in a man.' Well, Zane, it also liberates the qualities of a liar!"

Having talked with men like the late W. C. Boschen, who caught in 1917 the largest broadbill swordfish ever taken on sportsmanlike tackle, a fish weighing 463 pounds, who to accomplish this feat was willing to wait two years for a bite, and who once lost a swordfish after he had fought it eleven and a half hours, we raise our right hand and say Zane Grey is a truthful man. And the evidence can best be had by going out and seeking these game fish that when subdued with sportsmanlike tackle add to the glories of man.

Seeking these gladiators of the sea is no child's play. It requires a love of the outdoors, ability as an angler, strength to endure the gruelling work of lifting or pumping a fish to the surface, knowledge of the habits of fishes and to pit one's ingenuity against that of a creature that devotes its every effort to escape that which interferes with its liberty. Grey observes: "There lives no fisherman but what there lives a tuna that can take the conceit and the fight out of him."

To give a faint idea of the bewildering possibilities in the pursuit of the marlin or roundbill swordfish, "the royal purple game of the sea," let a few paragraphs tell of a marlin that had towed the boat six miles out to sea and back again:

"I could not stop him. I had begun to weaken. My hands were sights. My back hurt. But I stayed with him. He felt like a log and I could not recover line. Captain Dan said it was because I was almost all in, but I did not think that. Presently this swordfish turned inshore and towed us back the six miles. By this time it was late and I was all in. But the swordfish did not seem nearer the boat. I got mad and found some reserve strength. I simply had to bring him to gaff. I pulled and pumped and wound until I was blind and could scarcely feel. My old blisters opened and bled. My left arm was dead. I seemed to have no more strength than a kitten. I could not lead the fish nor turn him. I had to drag and drag, inch by inch. It was agonizing, but finally I was encouraged by sight of him, a long, fine, game fellow. A hundred times I got the end of the double line near the leader in sight, only to lose it.

"I had fought this swordfish nearly three hours. I could not last much longer. I rested a little, holding hard, and then began a last and desperate effort to bring him to gaff. I was absolutely dripping with sweat and red flashes passed before my eyes and queer dots. The last supreme pull—all I had left—brought the end of the leader to Captain Dan's outstretched hand.

"The swordfish came in broadside. In the clear water we saw him plainly, beautifully striped tiger that he was! And we all saw that he had not been hooked. He had been lassoed. In some way the leader had looped around him with the hook catching under the wire. No wonder it had nearly killed me to bring him to the boat, and surely I never would have succeeded had it not been for the record Captain Dan coveted. That was the strangest feature in all my wonderful Clemente experience—to see that superb swordfish looped in a noose of my long leader. He was without a scratch."

III.

Tales of Fishes is not confined entirely to the Pacific coast game fishes, but includes also tales of angling in the Gulf Stream, the Florida coast and the Atlantic. Angling for the sailfish in the Florida waters Grey has taken four in one day on light tackle, and although the sport is young and it is as difficult as it is trying, yet the sportsman who writes these "Tales of Fishes" says he does not know how to catch sailfish yet. This shows the untold possibilities of this class of angling, for an expert like Grey says that if a sailfish is hooked there are ten chances to one that the fish will free itself.

Grey is one of the few men who have taken on light tackle bonefish, the wisest, shyest, wariest, strangest fish he has ever studied. The sportsman angler makes the statement regarding its speed that no salmon, barracuda, no other fish celebrated for swiftness of motion, is in the bonefish class. "A bonefish is so incredibly fast," writes Grey, "that it was a long time before I could believe the evidence of my own eyes. You see him; he is there perfectly still in the clear, shallow water, a creature of fish shape, pale green and silver, but crystallike, a phantom shape, staring at you with strange black eyes; then he is gone. Vanished! Absolutely without your seeing a movement, even a faint streak! By peering keenly you may discern a little swirl in the water. As for the strength of a bonefish, I actually hesitate to give my impressions. No one will ever believe how powerful a bonefish is until he has tried to stop the rush and heard the line snap. As for his cunning, it is utterly baffling. As for his biting, it is almost imperceptible. As for his tactics, they are beyond conjecture."

At Long Key, Fla., "the lonely coral shore where the sun shines white all day and the stars shine white all night," Grey has hooked such rare fishes on rod and line as the dolphin and the waahoo, all of which will especially interest the angler who is familiar only with the common species of fish, but *Tales of Fishes* is so fascinatingly written that whether one is an angler or not he will find pleasure within its 267 pages. There are sixty photographs, some of them illustrating fish "walking on their tails," and there is one picture that the author considers was worth "its five years labor and patience," the photograph of the magnificent, flashing leap of the swordfish.

TALES OF FISHES. By Zane Grey. Harper & Bros.

The Best Loved of the Novelists

By GEORGE GORDON.

INDEED the first, the most abused, the most admired of English novelists—not, surely, "a lily prisoned in a gale of snow" nor (its more hideous opposite) a plain man's man, but, individual and alert, a creature of original genius, of rare courage and tireless energy, a true patriot in a jingo age, a stanch friend, a loyal husband, a fearless justice of the peace and withal the bravest wit in the London of his day—such was Henry Fielding, author of *Tom Jones,* manager of the Haymarket Theatre and (in his twenties) the most successful playwright in the town. Small wonder Major Rupert Hughes, whose vocabulary holds many a fair word of praise for lesser men and women, stammers in vain to find the fit superlative that shall contain the irony, the wisdom, the truth of Henry Fielding and not seem grudging in comparison.

And yet, in a recent issue of the *Bookman,* Mr. Chauncey B. Tinker says that "to the irreverent and the uninterested the account of his career must seem a tissue of documents and dulness."

Doubtless there be some to whom the story of the creation of the world appears of little moment; others who yawn as they read of Napoleon's derring-do in love and war. How many of these have in late life quelled by a fearless facing of the mob a riot on the streets or seen their gay inconsequence acted upon the stage night after night to crowded houses by so winning a comedienne as Mistress Kitty Clive? How many have threatened the abduction of an heiress in their teens, and, bound over to keep the peace, gone abroad to study law? What prodigal to-day returns to wed the belle of a cathedral town, to find his tales of highwaymen the most discussed literature among the learned?

It is true that Prof. Wilbur Cross, overanxious to cleanse his hero of sin, has in *The History of Henry Fielding* robbed his subject of half its vitality. Fielding has become a legend—not by any means Byronic, the favorite author of the scullery maid with fine manners and pale face, the beautiful martyr of love—but rather an embodiment of the reckless, hard drinking, snuff stained eighteenth century. Prof. Cross demurs. Fielding was, after all, a man in a world of men. It would have been impossible for him, accomplishing all that he did accomplish, to idle endlessly with the beaux of the coffee house or to intrigue his years away in green room amour. True enough. But that he forewent entire the pleasures of his generation is equally improbable. He was capable of extremes of laziness and toil. And I feel certain that Henley, in that most brilliant of Fielding essays, was nearer the truth than is Professor Cross in this more painstaking and accurate three volume history. Though it is easy for him, coming after them, with almost unlimited space and time at his command, commissioned by Yale to write his book, to prick the bubble of Thackeray's fanciful portrait or dispute the conclusions of Scott, I do not think that Prof. Cross has brought back Fielding to the life—I do not find the man in his pages as the man is present, if but occasionally, in Austin Dobson's monograph. And the fault lies in an endeavor to prove that he was cleaner, better than his age, whereas of all men that have ever written he most surely wrote for and was a product of his own day. The allusions to contemporary life, to the gossip of the moment, the brothel round the corner, the coffee house across the way, are in his comedies and in his novels as usual as in the newspaper of the morning after. And that his knowledge was gleaned at first hand—in the face of the stories that survive around his name, true in spirit if exaggerated in detail, why should we dispute this? That Prince Henry loved Falstaff does not prove him capable of conquering at Agincourt, but neither does Agincourt disprove his delight in that most monstrous of cowards. And that Fielding honored Amelia, understood the virgin heart of Sophia Western, in no wise contradicts his eye for the more robust charms of Mary Daniel or the fact that his son was born two months after his marriage to her.

Indeed, now that our faith in the lovable rakehell, badgered by bailiffs, the sport of circumstance, flinging off a masterpiece with a wet towel about his wine fevered head, has been sadly shaken by the dredging of those who seek proof of fire for every show of smoke, we are in danger of having a plastered saint palmed off upon us for the creator of Joseph Andrews and Parson Adams rather than that contradiction of clashing instincts, the squire's son thrown on the town to make a living by his wits, heir to a certain nobility of nature that knows the sterling worth of groom and gentry.

Nevertheless, we are deeply indebted to Professor Cross for his labors. He has searched for every note, for every letter, for every word that bears upon Fielding. If he is not always fair to Richardson, if he at times seems to patronize Dr. Johnson after the manner of the New York *Times,* if he generalize to a vagueness unbelievable concerning French novels, he must be forgiven—his concern is primarily with Fielding. Here at last we have the clay wherewith to recreate the man and the artist—clay that heretofore has been scattered to the winds. To all who are not of "the irreverent and the uninterested" these three volumes will mean much.

THE HISTORY OF HENRY FIELDING. By Wilbur L. Cross. New Haven: Yale University Press.